

Interactions between Racism, Homophobia, Incarceration, and HIV Testing in HPTN 061: The Brothers Study

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Background: Black men and transgender women who have sex with men and (BMTWSM) disproportionately bear much of the HIV burden in the United States, so HIV testing among this population is critical for successful treatment and prevention of HIV transmission. Racial discrimination, homophobia, and incarceration may be barriers to HIV testing among BMTWSM, but research on how these interact is limited.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the joint influence of the experience of racism and homophobia, versus exposure to either of these factors alone, on HIV testing in a U.S. sample of HIV-negative BMTWSM (n=1,110) with and without history of incarceration.

Methods: We analyzed data from the HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN) 061 (BROTHERS) study. Prevalence ratios for the association between experienced racism, homophobia, and their interaction with HIV testing were generated, stratified by incarceration status.

Results: Racism was marginally associated with lower HIV testing (aPR=0.84, 95% CI: 0.70, 1.04), while homophobia was significantly associated with lower HIV testing (aPR: 0.79, 95% CI: 0.63, 0.98) among those with a history of incarceration. The interaction between racism and homophobia was associated with unexpectedly higher HIV testing among those with a history of incarceration (Interaction aPR=1.40, 95% CI: 1.10, 1.78). Neither racism (aPR=0.88, 95% CI 0.63, 1.24) nor homophobia (aPR=0.83, 95% CI 0.55, 1.25) was significantly associated with testing among those with no incarceration history, though estimates were negative.

Conclusion: Among BMTWSM with a history of incarceration, racism and homophobia appear to pose as barriers to HIV testing. The finding that BMTWSM exposed to incarceration, racism, and homophobia have higher levels of HIV testing than other groups could be explained by a multitude of factors (e.g., resilience/coping that improves health care seeking, providers that perceive them to need HIV testing) and warrants further study.